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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
May 7, 2017  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60; 1 Peter 2:19-25  
Hymns: 436; 409; 783; 51 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: John 10:1-10

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup>But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

<sup>7</sup>Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who *ever* came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. <sup>9</sup>I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Sheep herders!

In Bible class we learned recently that caring for sheep was not a respected occupation among the Egyptians in the days of the patriarchs. Joseph instructed his brothers to be very upfront with the fact that they raised sheep when they had their audience before Pharaoh. The Egyptians held shepherds in contempt. They didn't want to be anywhere close to them. This fact was used by the Lord to make sure that the children of Israel would be separated from the rest of the Egyptian society, and not disappear by assimilation.

In United States history sheep herders were despised out in cattle country. They were blamed for ruining the range for cattlemen. They were often attacked. They were ostracized from the community around which they lived.

One might think that this would not be a favorable or acceptable image to be used for our Savior, and yet it is one that we find most fitting. One might even point out that the fact that the world despises Jesus and would reject Him goes along with our Bible history example as well as our American history, and might prove the accuracy of the image even from the negative. However it is not because Jesus was despised that we find such comfort in the image of Jesus as our Good Shepherd, but rather what it means for us as we examine the true qualities of a faithful Shepherd. This is one of the most popular images of Jesus for the child of God. We love to think of Jesus as our Shepherd. Jesus presented Himself to His disciples as the Good Shepherd to distinguish Himself from others who were NOT good and caring shepherds. While the better known references of Jesus as our Good Shepherd are found later in this chapter of Scripture, on the basis of our text let us consider -

**THEME: The Good Shepherd's Care:**

Throughout Scripture the Holy Spirit has used the picture of the faithful and good shepherd to communicate to us the real measure of the Savior's care for us. You see, a shepherd, a real good and faithful shepherd is so much more than just a sheep herder. So also in our text the Lord Jesus comes to us with a message that speaks

to us of the measure of His care for us. In the opening verses of our text it becomes clear that for Jesus --

## **I. It's Personal.**

**John 10:1-6** “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup>But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

Jesus tells us that there are those who seek to work among the sheep for whom it is impersonal. They don't care at all about the sheep. They care only for themselves. These are thieves and robbers who would steal the sheep or hurt the sheep. The sheep need to be protected from them, so at night the sheep may be gathered into a safe harbor, a pen where the entrance is guarded and the wolves are kept at bay.

Jesus chose this scene taken from real life from the Judean and Galilean countryside so the people would understand the need for someone who will only admit the shepherd also in the spiritual realms. Jesus was addressing that spiritual reality as He saw it in His ministry among the Jews. Those who presented themselves as shepherds: the priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees, cared more about their own political and personal spiritual agendas than they did about the sheep. The Pharisees made extra rules and regulations adding them to the law of God, not only for themselves but imposing these rules upon the consciences of all the people. In fact they often would rationalize ways to wiggle out of the same strident rules for life for which they imposed upon the common man. It all made them look good. They were always busy putting on the right kind of spiritual show for the people, basking in the glory that society heaped upon them for their sanctimonious living. That is exactly what it was. It wasn't sanctified living it was

sanctimonious living. It fooled the people but it didn't fool Jesus; it didn't fool God.

The scribes and priests were no better. They were so wrapped up in maintaining their political power structure that they neglected the spiritual welfare of the people. As a political group called the Sadducees they didn't even acknowledge that there was life after death, or an immortal soul. Their entire agenda was all about the here and now, life on this earth, and their place and position in this world.

What Jesus saw when He looked over the crowds saddened Him. He saw the people as sheep that were weary and scattered like sheep having no shepherd (Matthew 9:36).

All this still goes on in the religious culture of the world today. So many people are being served by shepherds that appear very spiritual, but really have no understanding of the gospel, or how one ought to administer the law and gospel. They impose rules upon people while they enhance their own image in society so that they may be acclaimed as being great moral leaders, esteemed theologians. But what about the people? What happens to the people? What happens when they are told to find peace with God through their charitable activities? What happens when they are told that the sins into which they have fallen are not sins at all, but are acceptable as long as everything is done in love and they maintain a positive attitude?

What happens is that these shepherds often grow churches into mega churches, and find more and more people rallying behind them, as they lead people down the path to destruction. They are thieves and robbers not admitted to the sheep fold through the gate, but are climbing in the back way.

Jesus cares about the sheep. For Jesus it is very personal, and not just about Him, or about this life. It is about real life, eternal life, abundant life; and the securing of that life for the sheep who cannot find their own way to life.

For Jesus it's personal! Jesus cares about the sheep. Yes, He cares about the entire flock, but not just the flock as a whole. He cares

about each and every one of the sheep within that flock. “**He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.** <sup>4</sup>**And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice**” (v. 3,4). Remember the words of our introit this morning. “**We are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand**” (Psalm 95:7). We are those sheep that Jesus cares about. We are those sheep that Jesus knows by name and calls by name, and leads out into green pastures of the gospel. We are the ones He cares for, and He tends to us in our need. For Jesus it is very personal, but it’s not about how He can gain an advantage. It is about us and preserving us, and securing life for us, not just in the here and now but the more abundant life that starts now in our souls but continues on into eternity. That is what Jesus died for. That is why Jesus rose again the third day. One doesn’t get that from just anyone anywhere. Strangers will not lead you into eternal life. Only Jesus does that, Jesus our Good Shepherd.

He laid it all for the people in this illustration, and we are told that they didn’t understand what He was talking about. Thank the Lord for the blessing of spiritual understanding that has been granted to us so that we understand that the Shepherd’s care for us is not about confining us or abusing us.

## **II. It’s Protective.**

**John 10:7-10** “Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who *ever* came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. <sup>9</sup>I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.”

In this second half of our text Jesus is presenting a related and yet different parable concerning His care for the sheep. In this parable Jesus is no longer the shepherd, but rather the **Door** to the sheep fold. The sheep fold is the safe haven for the sheep. There are many in this world, including many who came before Jesus was born, that presented themselves as savior. Jesus identified them as thieves and robbers. Since Jesus died upon the cross and rose again, showing the world that He is the true way to the Father,

many more have come along and insisted that they are also the true way to God. They also fall under this condemnation of our Savior. They are thieves and robbers and they prey upon men's souls.

They are not harmless. They are dangerous. They prey upon people's souls. Just because you may not always see the damage they do during this lifetime, one must not fall for the line that they are good people too. They are thieves and robbers. Okay, maybe I've said it often enough, but I get the impression that people aren't always heeding the Savior's warning. This isn't my warning. It's your Shepherd's warning, and He cares for you, and He would protect you from the harm and danger of these spiritual thieves and robbers.

Thieves steal by stealth. They are sneaky dangerous. These are the ones who may come to you in the sheep's clothing of another Christian denomination. They may also come in the guise of professional counselors, philosophers, scientists. The wise of this world. They may present the idea of religious pluralism, which means that there are many ways to come to God. They may argue that the beauty and cultural development of the different peoples of this world should be accepted for the richness of diversity of thought and religious expression that it can add to our culture also. That, my friends, is sneaky dangerous. That is not the Door to eternal life.

Robbers are more violent. The violence may be spiritual. Thousands upon thousands have been threatened, and coerced into bowing before false gods, be they the god's of eastern mysticism in Hinduism or Allah of Islam, or the gods of money and success and political correctness in our own western culture, these spiritual robbers are hard at work. The violence may be physical. More Christians are martyred today on a daily basis than at any other time in history, including the great and bloody persecutions of Roman Empire. This is happening regularly, daily across a wide swath of the globe encompassing the Northern Africa the Middle East and Southeast Asia all the way to the Philippines. Christians are being beheaded. Christians are being bombed. Christians are being burned alive. Some of the proponents of the religions that support such persecution are adamant in their right to claim that they are peace loving. Young people are being deceived to follow

after these robbers through professionally produced internet presentations. This is not make believe for the movies. These are real threats identified for us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thieves and robbers do not lead people to the green pastures of eternal life. Jesus is the Door to the sheepfold. Jesus is the way to eternal life. Jesus came into the world to bring us eternal life. Jesus is the Son of God incarnate. He gave His life for us as an offering and sacrifice to God. He offered Himself in our place to pay the debt we could never pay, the debt incurred by our sin. In paying that debt He endured the wrath of God against all sin. He died the death. He bore the curse. He carried our sorrows and the grief of our sin. He paid the price. He shed His blood. He redeemed us to God. The full measure of God's wrath was endured when Jesus called out, "**It is finished**" (John 19:30), and then gave up His Spirit into the Father's hands. God the Father declared "It is enough!" when He raised Jesus from death and the grave! That is what it took to open the Door to God and heaven above.

That is what was involved in Jesus being the door through which one must pass to enter into life. And that is exactly how Jesus fulfilled His mission of salvation so that we have life. Jesus came to bring us life, a more abundant life that one can know in this world. He brings life to our dead souls, and then prepares our place in heaven to which He shall call us that we might live with Him forevermore.

As the Door Jesus protects us from harm and danger, from every evil of body and soul. The protecting care of our Savior is there, even if we get sick and die, because He has preserved our soul. The protection is there, because Jesus has made it so that **whoever lives and believes in (Him) shall never die** (John 11:26). The protection is there because Jesus has made all things work together for that good of eternal life for those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). His purpose is our eternal salvation. And nothing, nothing in all of creation can now or ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:38-39). Because He is the door of the sheep whoever enters by Him "**will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.**" Through Jesus the door of the sheepfold we have abundant life forevermore.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.